

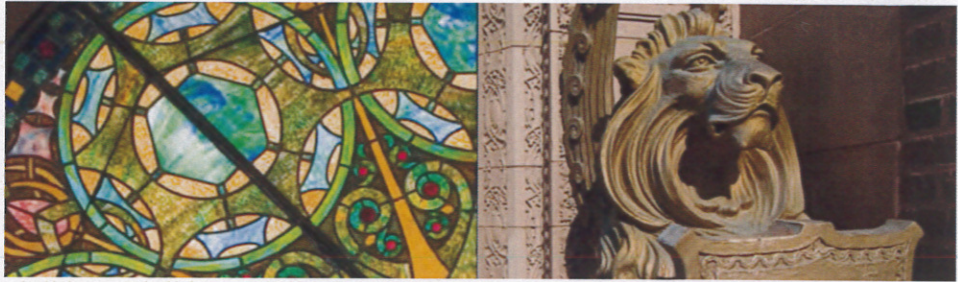
# MERCHANTS NATIONAL BANK BUILDING



## STEP INSIDE A JEWEL-BOX

**T**he Merchants National Bank building in Grinnell, Iowa, is one of the eight Midwestern “jewel-box” banks designed by Louis Sullivan, legendary American architect and mentor of Frank Lloyd Wright.

The phrase “jewel-box” was coined by Sullivan himself to convey the simplicity of the brick structure, which created the impression of a jewelry box while underscoring the security of those items stored inside. But it is not the simplicity of this building that draws visitors from around the world. It is Sullivan’s unparalleled ornamentation – from the awe-inspiring stained glass windows to the majestic griffins standing guard at the entrance to the geometric/organic explosion of terra-cotta that dominates the façade – that has made the building an international attraction.



## THE FATHER OF MODERN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE

**L**ouis H. Sullivan’s impact on America’s landscape cannot be understated and he continues to influence architects today. Sullivan developed a style beginning in the 1880s that was uniquely American, a style that also enabled the evolution of the steel-framed skyscraper. He designed some of the greatest American buildings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They include Chicago’s Auditorium Building, Stock Exchange and Schlesinger & Mayer Department Store, as well as the Wainwright Building in St. Louis.

However, it was Sullivan’s credo “form ever follows function” that continues to influence architects. His belief that a building’s purpose should determine its look inspired the development of the Prairie School of Architecture and its creator, Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright worked for Sullivan from 1887-1893 and referred to Sullivan as his “LieberMeister” (master).

## THE GEMS IN THE JEWEL-BOX

**T**he Merchants National Bank building has been recognized as a treasure by architects, historians and tourists since its construction in 1914 and has been a National Historic Landmark since 1976.

During your visit, enjoy the exquisite detail of each gem in this jewel-box:

- Terra-cotta portal, the most recognizable feature of the building
- Spectacular rose window with its maze of geometric and organic shapes
- Monumental stained-glass east windows, 15 feet high by 40 feet wide
- Elaborate glass mosaic around clock, designed by renowned artist Louis Millet
- Organic terra-cotta interior ornament
- Hand-carved wooden check desk
- Pink Tennessee marble floors

## MERCHANTS NATIONAL BANK BUILDING TIMELINE

1913

Sullivan sketches bank design during initial Grinnell visit.

1915

Grand opening on New Year’s Day.

1926

Citizens National Bank purchases & occupies building.

1956

First major remodeling of bank. Wood paneling is added to west wall and building is air conditioned.

1976

Building is designated as a National Historic Landmark by U.S. Secretary of Interior. 1974 addition completed.

1999

Sullivan Bank Building is no longer used for banking; staff moves into newly remodeled 1974 expansion. Building is leased to Grinnell Area Chamber of Commerce.

1914

Merchants National Bank closes due to agricultural depression of 1920s.

1924

Merchants National Bank closes due to agricultural depression of 1920s.

1930

Poweshiek County National Bank purchases Citizens National Bank.

1974

Construction of 12,000 sq. ft. north addition begins, plus partial restoration of original building including check desk and clock over front door.

1985

Bank’s name changed to Brenton National Bank.

2000

Wells Fargo Bank purchases Brenton Bank & the Sullivan Bank Building.

2004

Bank building becomes centerpiece of local marketing efforts and the focus of city’s new “Jewel of the Prairie” logo.

## THE BANK TODAY

**T**oday, the owner and steward of the bank is Wells Fargo, which occupies the 1974 addition. The jewel-box portion of the bank is home to the Grinnell Area Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau. The building hosts thousands of visitors from around the world who come to appreciate the bank’s architectural and historical significance.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO ARRANGE A GUIDED TOUR:** Contact the Grinnell Convention and Visitors Bureau at 641-236-6555 or by e-mail at [events@getintogrinnell.com](mailto:events@getintogrinnell.com). You can also visit us online at [www.getintogrinnell.com](http://www.getintogrinnell.com). The building is regularly open to visitors during the week from 8am to 5pm and during most weekends (hours vary). Please call ahead for specific hours.